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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0634  
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000574

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA  
NSC FOR MCDERMOTT/VROOMAN  
LONDON FOR LORD, PARIS FOR MILLER/NOBLES

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SYRIA AGREES IN PRINCIPLE TO (IDEALLY TRILATERAL)  
BORDER SECURITY INITIATIVE

REF: DAMASCUS 426

Classified By: CDA Charles Hunter for Reasons 1.5 b and d.

11. (C) SUMMARY. U.S. and Syrian Arab Republic Government (SARG) delegations agreed in principle August 12 to cooperate on joint assessments of three Iraq-Syria border crossings in eastern Syria as part of their respective efforts to strengthen border security and stem the flow of foreign fighters crossing the 640-kilometer Syrian-Iraqi border. The U.S. side proposed conducting the first joint assessment on August 18-19, and the remaining two by the end of September. The Syrian side responded that: (1) they have "no objection in principle" to conducting the joint assessments; (2) they would pass on U.S. requests for the specific dates of the joint assessments to the Syrian leadership for approval; and (3) they prefer Iraqi involvement in the joint assessments and subsequent planning meetings for the assessments. END SUMMARY.

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Participants  
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12. (C) U.S. delegation:

Major General (Maj Gen) Michael Moeller, CCJ5  
Charge d'Affaires Charles Hunter, Embassy Damascus  
Colin Kahl, DASD-OSD  
Frederic Hof, Office of the S/E  
Melissa Dalton, OSD-P, Syria Country Director  
Allison Monz, DOS-Syria Desk Officer  
Lt Colonel James Federwisch, CCJ5  
Jay Munir (notetaker)  
Wael Sawah, interpreter

SARG delegation:

Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmad Arnous  
General Jawdat Shaabo, Deputy Chief of the Operations Unit,  
Army  
General Ghassan al-Sheikh, Director of Planning Department,

Army  
General Yahya Taher, Chief of Border Forces  
Brigadier General Sayez Saqr, Office of the Ministry of  
Defense (MoD)  
Brigadier General Amin Sharaby, MoD, Syrian Military  
Intelligence (SMI)  
Brigadier General Abdul Salaam Dagestani, MoD, SMI  
Colonel Munir Sulaydy, Chief of Combating Terrorism Unit, SMI

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SARG EXPRESSES COMMITMENT TO BORDER SECURITY  
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¶3. (C) In an August 12 meeting at the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) building in Damascus, Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmed Arnous (DFM) welcomed the American delegation and stressed the SARG's commitment to the security of its long border with Iraq. Arnous, the sole spokesman for the Syrian side, stated Syria was committed to "peace and security in the region." He emphasized the SARG's commitment "to the implementation of the results" of the July 26 meeting between President Asad and Special Envoy Mitchell and to "deepening" the U.S.-Syrian relationship. Major General Moeller thanked Arnous for his welcome and noted the important role Syria could play in ensuring security and stability in the region. Moeller said U.S.-Syrian border security cooperation was a continuation of both the June 12 bilateral discussions (reftel) and the subsequent discussions between Asad and Mitchell. "We see this as enhancing cooperation on our joint goals of combatting violent extremists" and ensuring "a peaceful and stable Iraq," he said.

¶4. (C) Maj Gen Moeller requested SARG cooperation on conducting joint assessments of three border crossings at Al-Yarubiyeh, Abu Kamal, and Al-Tanf "to build on the momentum" of U.S.-Syrian engagement in the last several months. He suggested the first joint assessment (at Al-Yarubiyeh) take place on August 18-19, with the remaining two assessments slated for completion by the end of September. In response to a request for clarification by Arnous on what the assessments would entail, Maj Gen Moeller explained the assessments would be technical in nature and the American team would be composed of 6-8 members of the U.S. military led by a lieutenant colonel. "We propose that the teams go to see what training is needed and what procedures we can take to see if there are improvements we can make together," Maj Gen Moeller said. Following the three joint assessments, the two sides should meet again to discuss the results.

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SYRIANS AGREE "IN PRINCIPLE," BUT WANT IRAQI PARTICIPATION  
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¶5. (C) Arnous replied the SARG had "no objection in principle" to the three joint assessments, but it preferred to include Iraqi participation in the assessments and in subsequent discussions on the assessments and border security. "Because cooperation between Syria and Iraq is good, we want to eliminate any possibility of misinterpretation by Iraq of our meetings," Arnous said. The DFM added he could not confirm the dates of the joint assessments until he passed along the requested dates to "our leadership."

¶6. (C) Maj Gen Moeller agreed Iraqi participation on border security was important. He said Syrian-U.S. bilateral cooperation on the issue also remained a priority. Maj Gen Moeller argued setting concrete dates for the joint assessments represented an important first step in improving relations between the U.S. and Syria under the "political umbrella" established during talks between President Asad and S/E Mitchell. The Iraqis, he suggested, could be invited to participate once the dates were set. Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs Hof stated the USG also preferred a trilateral approach to border security cooperation, but

stressed it was important for U.S.-Syrian bilateral cooperation to begin immediately. President Asad and S/E Mitchell had "made great progress on this subject," agreeing in their discussions the U.S. and Syria must start this border security cooperation process "as soon as possible." Hof added he would address the subject in his scheduled meeting with Foreign Minister Muallim the following day (septel). Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Kahl interjected that an estimated date for the joint assessments would be useful to convince the Iraqis to participate in the border security assessments.

17. (C) The DFM responded he would communicate the U.S. request to the SARG leadership, and reiterated his preference to invite the Iraqis to a "trilateral meeting" in advance of the assessments. (NOTE. The U.S. proposal calls for a trilateral meeting after the assessments to discuss the findings and possible next steps each side can take. END NOTE). "The Iraqis are very important to this. Our cooperation with the Iraqis on this subject is continuing and they want to be a part of this," the DFM maintained. Arnous stressed the SARG's commitment to working with the U.S. and Iraq on border security issues, adding "we hope that by the end of this year this cooperation will be completed. Arnous then stated the SARG was looking forward to a visit from General Petraeus. Maj Gen Moeller responded that, although he had no information about the timing of such a visit, "what we agree on today and what we implement during the coming weeks will have a great impact on this issue."

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SARG TRUMPETS ITS COMMITMENT TO STOPPING FOREIGN FIGHTERS  
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18. (C) The DFM outlined Syria's efforts in the "fight against terrorism" and stopping the flow of foreign fighters through Syrian territory. He stated Syria had suffered from terrorism in the past and was the first country to call for an international conference against terrorism. "Fighting terrorism is basic in Syria," he declared. Regarding Iraq, Arnous said, "both internally and through cooperation with Iraq, Syria has played a big role in lifting pressure in Iraq" and improving the security situation there. Arnous insisted the SARG had cooperated with Iraq on border security issues "on land and at airports" and had "extended checks on those crossing through Syria." As a result of these efforts, Arnous said, "a large number of suspects have been arrested." "There is fear in terrorist cells that crossing Syria is not easy and they refrain from crossing Syria," claimed Arnous.

19. (C) Arnous said he understood the discussions on border security were an important first step in improving bilateral U.S.-Syrian relations, but the two sides had already initiated a dialogue on a number of shared issues. "There are many other first steps that have been taken," he suggested. Maj Gen Moeller stressed the importance of progress on the border assessments to the improvement of U.S.-Syrian relations. The DFM concurred, saying "We understand and take the view that this cooperation is good." Arnous pledged to consult his political leadership and provide a response to the U.S. team.

HUNTER